

Los Angeles - The following is Congresswoman Linda Sánchez' (CA-39) statement on the Immigration and Naturalization bills before the 108th Congress. Her District Director Bill Grady read this statement at the Asian Pacific American Legal Center event today. The Congresswoman was in Washington, DC for votes. Congresswoman Linda Sánchez is a member of the Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Claims and the Asian American Caucus.

Introduction by District Director Bill Grady:

"Hello, I am the District Director for Congresswoman Linda Sánchez, who is the new U.S. Congresswoman for 15 communities and 650,000 people in Southeast Los Angeles County, stretching from Watts south to Cerritos, Artesia, and Lakewood and north to Whittier and La Mirada.

I'd like to thank the Asian Pacific American Legal Center for inviting me to today's press conference."

Congress is in session today in Washington, and so the Congresswoman regrets that she cannot be here personally but she asked me to read a message on her behalf."

Statement of Congresswoman Linda Sánchez:

"Greetings to everyone gathered today in Los Angeles to announce the "Asian Pacific American Legal Center's Citizenship Video Project."

Citizenship is the key to many of the privileges that make the United States a great country, such as the right to vote, the right to obtain a passport and travel freely, and the protection of the U.S. government when abroad.

For the millions of immigrants from around the world who leave their home countries, make sacrifices, and work hard building new lives in the United States, becoming a citizen is the ultimate reward.

In the last year, Democrats in Congress have recognized the importance of citizenship to the many immigrants who contribute to our country, and they have introduced several new bills that would help immigrants along the long road of naturalization by granting them legal permanent resident status.

Two bills, the Immigration Adjustment Act and the USA Family Act, adjust the status of undocumented immigrants with longstanding ties to the United States who have been contributing positively to our country to legal permanent residents.

The Student Adjustment Act, which I am a primary sponsor of, and the DREAM Act make the road to citizenship smoother for undocumented immigrant students. These bills allow certain immigrant students who have been in the United States for at least five years and have satisfied certain educational requirements to adjust their status to legal permanent resident status.

There are also bills that I support to help the 37,000 legal permanent residents serving in our Armed Forces to become citizens. I am also sponsoring the Citizenship for America's Troops Act, which would ease the financial and logistical burdens that legal permanent resident troops (or "green card troops" as they are often called) face under our current immigration laws as they try to become naturalized citizens.

Last but not least, I am sponsoring the Naturalization and Family Protection for Military Members Act, which would reduce the amount of time that must be served in the military to apply for naturalization, eliminates filing fees, and extends benefits to spouses, children and parents of legal permanent residents who die while serving our nation in the military.

On another important front, it was encouraging to see the President discuss immigration principles in his recent State of The Union Address. However, the President's principles did not provide an improved path to legalization and citizenship for the millions of immigrants contributing to our country. Under the President's principles, immigrants will work for years benefiting American companies, without earning legal status or citizenship. I would like to see the President introduce a bill that helps immigrants become legal residents and eventually citizens of the United States, not just principles that create a pool of labor for American businesses.

There are many benefits to the Video Project of the Legal Center. The bills introduced in Congress make changes to our immigration laws, but they do not educate immigrants about how to apply for citizenship.

That is why the Asian Pacific American Legal Center's Citizenship Video Project is such a great idea. The videos educate immigrants on the often-complex naturalization process and, most importantly, do so in the immigrant's first language. These videos will help take some of the fear out of applying for citizenship and will help reduce the number of immigrants who make mistakes in the naturalization process.

I commend the Asian Pacific American Legal Center for producing this video and helping immigrants become citizens of the United States. I hope other naturalization advocates will use the videos as a model for their immigrant communities.

I will continue to do all that I can in Congress to make improvements in our immigration laws so that every immigrant who contributes to the United States has a fair opportunity to become a citizen.

Thank you."